

Communicable Disease Update

Zoonoses: In our area, persons come into contact with wild animals in settings such as state fairs, petting zoos and educational exhibits in schools. Potentially this contact puts people at risk for developing zoonotic diseases such as Salmonella, E. coli 0157:H7 and rabies. Animals of concern include amphibians, reptiles, young ruminants and any ill animals. Hand washing is the essential action to prevent transmission of disease for those having close contact with animals. Furthermore, certain groups at high risk for serious illness (children < 5 years old, or those pregnant, cognitively impaired or immunocompromised) should avoid contact with animal exhibits, which includes the animals and their environment. For additional information, please refer to the CDC MMWR report titled "Compendium of Measures To Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings, 2005", which can be found at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5404a1.htm.

Influenza: The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) continues to monitor for Influenza-like illness (ILI) using several different surveillance methods. As of the week ending March 25, Virginia remains at the highest ILI activity level "Widespread", for the eighth consecutive week. For a description of the influenza surveillance system in Virginia as well as definitions of all the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) activity levels (such as "Widespread") and a graphical comparison of the current and previous influenza seasons, please refer to the VDH website at www.vdh.virginia.gov/epi/flu.htm.

The adjacent graphic represents the number of influenza cases reported by local providers in Henrico County to the health department since the beginning of this year.

A recent article by Call, et al examines the evidence behind the clinical diagnosis of influenza-like illness. If true, these results could call into question our ILI surveillance approach. (JAMA 2005; 293:987-997)

Anthrax scares at U.S. Postal Facilities: Recently, two post offices in Northern Virginia experienced false positive tests for anthrax during routine environmental sampling. In response to the anthrax attacks of October, 2001, many large postal facilities around the nation have begun routine environmental sampling for anthrax using a variety of systems. Such testing is also occurring in one or more postal facilities in the Richmond area. If a positive alarm occurs, the Virginia Department of Health will work closely with the U.S. Postal Service and other agencies to investigate the credibility of the threat and to protect the Postal employees via decontamination and prophylaxis if warranted. Concurrently, Henrico Health Department will be in contact with local hospitals and medical professionals to facilitate your evaluation and treatment of patients who present with possible anthrax exposure.

Dr. Levine's Arrival: Effective February 15, 2005, Dr. Mark J. Levine has taken over as the director of the Henrico County Health Department. Dr. Levine was appointed by the State Health Commissioner and comes to Henrico from the Piedmont Health District where he served as the health department director for approximately 3 years. Prior to that Dr. Levine was a practicing family physician in Pennsylvania. His tenure included directing a family practice residency and 16 years of clinical practice experience. Dr. Levine received his MPH from the Bloomberg School of Public Health of Johns Hopkins University.

